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“Vsyo Normalno”—in Russia

by [Jonathan Brent](#)

On the daily strains of Russian life

Russia, it has been truly said, lurches from crisis to crisis. The news today portends many crises to come with many unpredictable outcomes. No single perspective— economic, political, social, historical explains the reality of this country of Tolstoy and Stalin, Shostakovich and Brezhnev, Herzen and Yeltsin. No one voice— democrat, Communist, fascist, orthodox— speaks for the country of Pushkin and Zhirinovsky. While I waited in Moscow’s Sheremetevo airport at *Passportny kontrol*, in what the Russians think a line, but which resembles more what might be considered a meteorological front, a Russian seeing my annoyance observed: “Russia is many countries. It takes time,” as if this explained everything.

On the streets of Moscow in late August 1998, contradictory realities collide. The country seems poised in a state of anarchy that is yet not quite chaos. It is a psychological, political, soci ...

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